

Drops from an Ocean

by
Mawlana
Jalaluddin Rumi



Noorul Ilm

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MASJIDE NUORUL ISLAM

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Editor's Introduction

Certainly, this book could be regarded simply as a collection of entertaining and amusing short stories. Clearly they are more than this. We do not need to adopt the pseudo-sufic approach – that Sufism is a school of freemasonic secret masters – to notice these stories' profundities. However, certain things need to be said, which by and large are not said these days, in order to approach Mawlana Rumi, may Allah show mercy to him, with the courtesy which is the key to understanding. The one thing that is absolutely clear to anyone who reads the Mathnawi with an unprejudiced mind is that Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi was a truly great Muslim. Here is a man who planted his flag squarely in the middle ground of Islam.

Now, few Shaykhs of Sufism have had their teachings more plundered by the irregular troops of Western and Eastern esotericism than Mawlana Rumi. The only other comparable case is that of Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din Ibn al-'Arabi, may Allah show mercy to him, whose work has been stolen wholesale by 'Appreciation Societies' largely composed of non-Muslims and compliant, or lapsed, Muslims.

However, both men's writings are clearly commentaries on the Qur'an and the Sunnah – which presuppose that the reader is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah – although they are equally obviously not tafsirs of the Qur'an in the sense that this is ordi-

narily understood. Yet, the Mathnawi is staggeringly orthodox. The only way we can approach this is by re-investigating the over-researched subject of Sufism.

The sweeping criticisms that Islamic extremists make of the Sufis are clearly ridiculous since they lead us to discount untold millions of perfectly ordinary Muslims throughout history from the very first days of Islam – people who are the very salt, flour, water and yeast of Islam. Moreover, they require us similarly to reject a staggering number of the outstanding salihun and men and women of knowledge of Islam. It is laughable to suggest that all of these people could have been so completely wrong, and that it took an obscure tribe from Najd to bring us genuine Islam more than a thousand years after they allege that it had been lost, particularly when the said tribe had been lavishly funded through Winston Churchill by another obscure tribe from southern Russia who wished to establish a homeland in Palestine.

However, if we insist on going beyond that and beyond also the propaganda of many pseudo-Sufis, we push through to something quite unexpected. For, if we were, in compliance with the extremists' thesis, to abandon the Sufism of the long grey beards, the great tasbihs and the tall turbans – a Sufism that many Moroccan Sufis had already warned us against – and to initially confine ourselves to the Salaf and their successors, we would be astonished to find that we are dealing with many of the same figures with whom we had been familiar from the Tekke and the Zawiyya.

For example there is Hasan al-Basri firmly established in the Muwatta of Imam Malik and in the Sahih of al-Bukhari. There is Dhu'n-Nun al-Misri learning the Muwatta directly from Malik and transmitting it from memory. There is Shaykh Abu Bakr ash-Shibli, the great pupil of Imam Junayd of Baghdad, a Maliki faqih. Indeed, from the one tariqah with which this writer is

most familiar, the Darqawiyyah-Shadhiliyyah-Qadiriyyah, there is scarcely a Shaykh of note who was not a faqih before taking the path of the Sufis. Shaykh Ahmad az-Zarruq, for example, is as well known in the annals of Maliki fiqh as he is in those of Sufism, may Allah have mercy on all these men of the deen.

Now, we cannot make sense of this picture if we content ourselves with the simplistic formulations of the pseudo-Sufis, who see existence in terms of outward and inward knowledge, denigrating the former and exalting the latter.

It is clear that such a denigration satisfies the intellectually lazy, as, on the other hand and more seriously, a rejection of the sciences of tasawwuf suits those who do not wish to contend with the rampages of the human self, which we know from the hadith to be our worst enemy.

The Sufis have always affirmed the importance and necessity of the shari'ah, not simply as an end in itself, but as a means to arriving at and protecting direct knowledge of Allah in the inward. Complacency about the outward sciences and the laws of Islam might have been conceivable in some golden epoch where Islam could be said to have been fully established, but in the age in which we live – when a complete functioning Islam cannot with any seriousness be said to be in place other than in some isolated and therefore relatively limited locations – the mere affirmation of the importance of the shari'ah is not enough.

I am reminded of a man who spent his working day in the market, selling small items of thread, ribbons and clothing, whilst immersed in constant dhikr of Allah. Under his counter he had three boxes into which he divided equally his receipts: a dirham in this, a dirham in that and a dirham in that.

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The contents of one box were used to restock his small stall with merchandise, the contents of the next were spent on his family's

needs, and the contents of the other were given to the poor and needy. If one box was empty, he would not 'borrow' from one of the other boxes – even if this meant that he would go hungry while a passing beggar would be fed. This man was unknown to the world but honoured greatly among the Sufis of his time. Among them he was known as a man whose supplications were always answered.

However, people today who would aspire to that condition must first engage in a sustained programme of outward action before they can safely undertake their retreat and embark on their inward journey since Islam itself is greatly imperilled and, in places, vanishing. Now the Sufis will do this, as they always have. With the occupation by the usury-driven empires of the Europeans of Muslim lands, the Sufis emerged from the *zawiyyas* to struggle for the preservation of Islam.

With all the foregoing in mind, then, read these delightful stories which we have taken from the Mathnawi only in order to draw the reader's attention to that extraordinary work, which should be read in its entirety. However, if you have any aspiration at all to understand existence, then do not be contented with books, since we are an *ummi* – unlettered – nation, and all our sciences are properly taught orally – that is, people learn them directly from other people of knowledge. In order to really find out, it is necessary to seek out a teacher and a circle of sane people whose sanity is proven by their engagement in the re-establishment of the *deen* of Islam free from all the insanities of extremism and the puerilities of pseudo-Sufism. This is no more radical a notion than asserting that the best way to learn carpentry is from a master carpenter in the company of other apprentices. The only acceptable teacher is one who has been given clear authorisation to teach by his teacher. Just as it is necessary to be wary of the wild gun-toting revolutionary – since 'revolu-

tion' is the circular movement that permits the system to continue undisturbed with merely a change of figures at the top – beware also of 'teachers' with long grey beards and big turbans, whether they teach the sciences of the *shari'ah* or of the inward journey, if they do not have a permission to teach which traces directly back, from living teacher to living teacher, to the greatest teacher of all, the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Allah and the world

A peasant tied his ox in a stable. A lion ate his ox and sat in its place. The peasant went into the stable to see his ox. Groping in corners, the man looked for his ox in the night.

He rubbed his hands over the limbs of the lion, and over its back and sides, now above and now below.

The lion said to himself, "If the light were a bit brighter, he would die of fear. He is stroking me like this so boldly because in this dark night he thinks I am the ox."

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Worship of the heart

Musa and the shepherd

Musa (AS) saw a shepherd on the way who was saying: "O Allah, You who choose whom You will, where are You, so that I may become Your servant and repair Your shoes and comb Your hair? That I may wash Your clothes and kill Your lice and bring You milk, O worshipful One; that I may kiss Your little hand and stroke Your little foot, and at bed-time I may sweep Your little room, O You for whom all my goats are sacrificed, O You in remembrance of whom I sigh and moan!"

The shepherd spoke foolish words in this way. Musa said, "Man, to whom are you speaking?"

He answered, "To that One who created us; by whom this earth and heavens were created."

"Listen!" said Musa, "you have gone out of Islam; you are not a Muslim, you have become a kafir. What rubbish is this? What indecency and raving? Stuff some cotton into your mouth! The stench of your bad language has made the whole world stink; your bad language has turned the silken robe of Islam into rags. Shoes and socks are fitting for you, but how are such things right for One who is more glorious than the sun? If you do not stop your mouth saying these words, a fire will come and burn up all the people. Indeed, if a fire has not already come, then what is this smoke?"

"Why has your soul become black and why has your spirit been rejected by Allah? If you know that Allah is the Judge, how is it right for you to indulge in this childish talk and familiarity?"

"Truly, the friendship of a stupid man is enmity; the exalted Allah does not need service like this."

"To whom are you saying this? To your father's and mother's brothers, your uncles? Does the Lord of Glory have such things as a body and its needs?"

"Only one who is growing drinks milk; only one who has need of feet puts on shoes."

"If you call a man 'Fatima' – young men and women are all of one kind – he will try to murder you if it is possible for him, even if he is good natured, patient and quiet."

"The name Fatima is a term of praise for women, but if you address a man with it, it's like the thrust of a spearhead."

"Hand and foot are terms of praise for us, but for the holiness of Allah they are pollution."

"The words: '**He did not give birth, He was not born**' (Qur'an, Surat al-Ikhlās) are true of Him. He is the Creator of the one who gives birth and the one who is born."

"Everything that has a body is born; whatever is born is on this side of the river. Because it is from the world of those things which grow, transform and then decay, it is contemptible; it has been created and certainly needs a Creator."

The shepherd said, "Musa you have closed my mouth and you have burned my soul with repentance."

He tore his garment and heaved a sigh, and heavily turned his head towards the desert and went on his way.

How Allah reproached Musa

A revelation came to Musa (AS) from Allah, "You have parted my servant from Me. Did you come as a prophet to join together? Or did you come to cut apart? As much as you are able, do not set foot in separation; of all permitted things the most hateful to Me is divorce.

"I have given everyone his own particular way of acting. I have given everyone a special form of expression. From him it is praiseworthy, but from you it is blameworthy. From him it is honey, but from you it is poison.

"I do need neither purity nor impurity, laziness in worship or eagerness to worship Me.

"I have not made worship obligatory in order to make a profit. Rather, I do it as a kindness to My slaves.

"I am not made holy by their glorifying Me; it is they who become pure and radiant. I do not look at the tongue or speech; I look at the inward and at the state.

"I gaze into the heart to see whether it is humble, even though the words he uses are not humble, because the heart is the essential thing, and speech is secondary. The secondary thing is less important, it is the essential thing which is the real matter.

"How much more of these words, concepts and metaphors? I want burning, burning: become friendly with that burning!

"Light up a fire of love in your soul, burn thought and expression completely away.

"Musa! Those who know the rules and customs are one type; those whose souls and spirits burn are of another type."

When Musa (AS) heard these reproaches from Allah, he ran into the desert in search of the shepherd.

At last he overtook him and saw him. The bringer of good news said:

"Permission has come from Allah. Do not seek rules and methods; say whatever your heart desires.

"Your way of speaking is the true way, and your way is the light of the spirit. You are saved and through you a whole world is saved. O you who are made safe by '**Allah does whatever He wills**' (Qur'an, Surah Ibrahim: 29), free your tongue and do not worry about what you say."

He said, "Musa, I have passed beyond that. I have passed beyond the Lote Tree of the Furthest Limit. I have gone a hundred thousand years' journey on the other side. You applied the whip and my horse was frightened, made a leap and passed beyond the sky."

* * *

Take good heed! Whether you praise Allah or thank Him, know that it is just like the silly language of the shepherd. Even if, in comparison to his, your praise is better, yet to Allah it is also feeble.

Allah's acceptance of your praise is from His mercy.

This earth is a sign of Allah's mercy, because like His mercy, it receives filth and gives flowers.

The Prophet (SAAS) and the stones

There were some pebbles in the hand of Abu Jahl. "O Ahmad," he said, "Tell me quickly what this is; if you are the Messenger, what is hidden in my fist, since you have knowledge of the secrets of heaven?"

He said (SAAS), "What would you like? Shall I tell you what those things are, or should they declare that I am truthful and right?"

Abu Jahl said, "This second thing would be more extraordinary."

"Yes," the Prophet (SAAS) said, "Allah has greater power than that." Right away, from inside his closed hand every pebble began to say the shahadah.

Each said, "There is no god" and each one said, "except Allah" and "Ahmad is the Messenger of Allah."

When Abu Jahl heard this from the pebbles, in his anger he threw those pebbles on the ground.

Prophets, leaders and followers

A little mouse caught a camel's reins in his forelegs. Pretending to be the owner he went off with it. The camel went happily along, so that the mouse was tricked into thinking that he was a hero. The camel knew that he thought this. He said to himself, "I will show you! Enjoy yourself!"

They came to the bank of a great river. Even a lion or a wolf would have lost heart. There the mouse stopped. He was paralysed.

The camel said, "My companion, why are we standing still? Why are you worried? Step forward bravely! Go into the river! You are my guide and leader. Don't stop midway and be confused!"

The mouse said, "This is a huge deep river. I am afraid of drowning." The camel said, "Let me see how deep the water is," and he set foot in it. "The water," he said, "is only up to my knee. Blind mouse, why did you become worried and lose your wits?"

The mouse replied, "It is like an ant to you, but to me it is like a dragon. There is a big difference between one knee and another. It is only up to your knee, but it is hundreds of times above the top of my head."

The camel said, "Another time, do not behave so boldly. Argue with mice like yourself, because a mouse has nothing to say to a camel."

The mouse said, "I am sorry. For the sake of Allah get me across this deadly water!"

The camel took pity on him. "Listen," he said, "Jump up and sit on my hump. Being able to cross the river has been given to me as a gift. I could take across hundreds of thousands like you."

* * *

Since you are not a prophet, go on the road after the prophets, so that one day you may come out of the pit and rise to a place of power. Be a servant since you are not a lord. Don't steer the boat yourself since you are not a boatman.

Since Iblis had become used to being a leader, he looked at Adam with disbelief. He said, "Is there another leader better than me, so that he should be served by someone like me?"

Being a leader is a poison, except to the spirit which has a great deal of the antidote.

The disbeliever rejects beauty

One day a man fainted immediately on coming into the perfumers market. The scent of the perfume from their stalls hit him. His head reeled and he fell on the spot. It was noon when he fainted, and lay like a dead body, in the middle of the road.

The people gathered around him. They were all saying, "There is no strength but by Allah." Everybody tried a remedy.

One put his hand on his heart. Another sprinkled rose-water. He did not know that it was the smell of the rose-water which had caused the disaster. Another massaged his hands and head. One made incense from Aloes wood and sugar. Another took some of his clothing off.

One felt his pulse to see if it was beating. Another smelt his breath to find out if he had drunk wine or eaten hashish.

Nobody, however, could understand why he had fainted.

They quickly brought the news to his family, "So-and-so is lying there in a faint. No one knows how it happened, or what led to it."

The man worked at tanning the dead animal skins to turn them into leather. This is a smelly and dirty job. He used many dirty ingredients such as dung. Many old-time crafts-people used dung and urine and other foul things.

He had a brother who was clever and wise and he came immediately and in a great hurry. He carried a small amount of dog's dung up his sleeve.

The brother cut his way through the crowd and approached. He was very upset. "I know," said he, "from where his illness comes. When you know the cause, the cure is obvious. When you don't know the cause, the remedy for the illness is difficult to find."

He said to himself, "The smell of dog's dung has filled his brain and even his veins. When he works as a tanner, he is up to his waist in filth, seeking his livelihood.

"The great Greek doctor Galen said, 'Give the patient what he is used to. His illness comes from doing something against his habit. Find his remedy from his habits'.

"He is a tanner, and so he is used to carrying dung. He has become like a dung-beetle, which also faints because of rose-water. His medicine is the same dung which he is used to."

The young man drove the people back. He did not want them to see his treatment.

He came close to his brother's ear, as if he was telling him a secret. Then he put his hand close to his nose, because he had rubbed the dog's dung on his palm.

A little time passed. Then the man began to move. The people said, "This is an amazing charm. This young man recited charms into his ear. He was dead and the charms revived him."

* * *

The disbelievers who cannot stand to hear the Qur'an and to hear about Allah and His Messenger (SAAS) are like this man. They are so used to disgusting dirty things that beautiful and fragrant things make them pass out and faint.

Seekers and others

There was once a greengrocer who had a parrot which had a beautiful voice and could talk like a human being. It would sit on a bench and watch over the shop and it could talk cleverly to all the traders.

When it spoke to human beings it spoke just like them. It was also very clever in singing like a parrot.

Once it jumped off the bench and flew off, and as it jumped it knocked over some bottles of rose-oil. Soon after its master came from his house and sat down on the bench and relaxed as traders do. Suddenly he saw that the bench was covered in oil and also his clothes. He hit the parrot on the head and it became bald from the blow.

For some days it said nothing. The greengrocer was deeply sorry and sighed a lot; he tore at his beard and said, "The sun of my happiness has gone behind the clouds. I wish that my hand had been broken at that moment! How could I have hit that sweet songbird?"

Now, dervishes are Muslims who seek knowledge of Allah. Because they are busy travelling the path to Him, they have little time to make money and so they are often very poor. On the other hand, Muslims often try to please Allah by giving to the poor, so the greengrocer gave presents to all the dervishes. He

hoped to get the speech of the bird back, but nothing worked.

After three days and nights, he was still sitting unhappily on the bench and he was very sorry. Indeed, he was in despair. He kept showing the bird every sort of wonder hoping that it would speak.

At that time a bareheaded dervish passed by, dressed in an old woollen cloak. His head was as bald and smooth as a china bowl.

The parrot was astonished and began to talk. He screeched at the dervish, "Hey you! How did you become bald? Did you too spill bottles of oil?"

Everybody laughed at the parrot. He thought that the dervish was just the same as him and that the dervish was bald for the same reason.

However the dervish was a noble lover of Allah and you cannot measure the lovers of Allah the same way you measure other people.

This is the way the whole world has gone wrong. Everyone thinks that the lovers of Allah are just like they themselves. They say, "We are men and they are men. We are both forced to eat and to sleep." In their blindness they cannot see that there is a huge difference between them.

The wasp and the bee both look the same. They eat the same foods, but one has a terrible sting and the other makes sweet honey. There are two types of deer both of which eat grass and drink water. One only gives dung, but the other gives musk perfume.

There are two types of reed. One is just empty and hollow. The other is the sugar-cane which gives you sugar.

It is the same with human beings. Some people just eat food and produce dung. There are some who eat and are full of the light of Allah.

Those who make claims

The Peacock of the Highest Heaven

A jackal went into the dyeing-vat, stayed in it for a while, and then came out, his skin become multi-coloured, saying, "I am the Peacock of the Highest Heaven"

His coloured fur had gained a charming brilliance, and the sun shone upon those colours. He saw himself to be green and red, brown and yellow, and so he showed himself conceitedly to the other jackals.

They all said, "O little jackal, what is the matter, that you gloat in your head so much? Because of your gloating you have turned aside from us with disdain; where did you get this arrogance?"

One of the jackals went to him and said, "O so-and-so, are you acting dishonestly or are you really one of those whose hearts rejoice in Allah? You act dishonestly so that you can jump on to the mimbar and by your babble give these people feelings of regret. You have worked hard, but you have not felt any spiritual passion, so as a trick you display a piece of boldness."

Spiritual passion belongs to the close friends of Allah and prophets. On the other hand, boldness is the trick of every pretender. They draw people's attention to themselves, saying, "We are joyous with Allah," though at heart they are dreadfully unhappy.

A Braggart

A person, who was thought little of, used to oil his moustache every morning and go among rich people, saying, "I have eaten some very rich food at the party."

He would gaily put his hand on his moustache as a sign, as if meaning to say, "Look at my moustache! For this is evidence of the truth of my words and the sign that I have eaten delicious oily food."

His stomach would say in silent reply, "May Allah destroy the plots of liars! Your boasting has set me on fire; may that oily moustache of yours be ripped out! If it were not for your stupid boasting, beggar, some generous man would have taken pity on me. If you had shown what you are suffering in truth and had not played a false part, some doctor would have prepared a remedy for it."

Allah has said, "Do not move ear or tail crookedly; **their truthfulness will benefit the truthful.**" (Qur'an 5: 119)

Do not attempt to hide your real condition, reveal that which is really happening with you, and **act straight** (Qur'an 9; 114), or if you do not tell of your weakness, at least avoid useless talk. Do not destroy yourself by showing off and trickery.

If you have money, do not open your mouth and so put others to the test. There are touchstones on the Way, and for the touchstones too there are tests concerning their own (inward) states.

Allah has said, "From birth to death **they are tried every year twice.**" (Qur'an 9; 127)

There is test after test, O father: beware, do not (be ready to) buy yourself at the smallest test.

Love of one's land

This, you stubborn man is the story of a lake in which there were three great fish. You may have read it elsewhere, but that is only the husk of the story while this is the spiritual kernel.

Some fishermen passed by the lake and saw the three fish concealed there. They hurried to bring a net, but the fish noticed and became aware of their intention. The intelligent fish resolved to journey; he decided to make the difficult and unwelcome journey. He said: "I will not seek the advice of the others, because they will certainly weaken me. Their love of their native place and of where they live has great power over their souls. Their laziness and ignorance will affect me."

For advice, a good and spiritually alive person is needed, so that he will make you spiritually alive. Where is that alive person to be found? Traveller, take the advice of a traveller, for the advice of a settled person will make you lame in your foot. Move on from the literal expression, "love of country". Do not stop at its apparent meaning. Your real country is Beyond, O soul, it is not on this side. If you desire your real country, cross to the other side of the stream. Do not misread this true hadith, "Love of one's country is a part of Iman."

"Love of one's country" is right, but first, what really is your country?

The wise fish said, "I will travel. I will keep my heart away from their advice and counsel."

It is not a time for advice. Listen, travel! Go by night and let your movement be hidden, like the night patrol. Set out from this lake towards the sea; seek the sea and leave this whirlpool.

That cautious fish swam away and went from its dangerous dwelling to the sea of light, like a deer which is being pursued by a hunting dog keeps running as long as there is a single nerve in its body. The hare's sleep while the dog is following is a serious wrong action.

The fish left and took its way to the sea. It took the far way to the great expanse of the sea. It suffered much, and in the end it went, after all, towards safety and welfare. It threw itself into the deep Sea whose edge no eye can see.

When the fishermen brought their net to the lake, the half-intelligent fish was bitterly unhappy at that. He said, "Oh no! I have lost the opportunity. Why did I not accompany that guide? He went off suddenly. I should have gone after him quickly."

It is wrong to regret the past. What is gone will not come back. To remember it is of no use.

The second fish said at the time of trouble, when he was separated from the protection of the intelligent one, "He has gone towards the sea and is free from sorrow. Such a good comrade I have lost! But I will not think of that. I will look after myself. At this time I will pretend to be dead. Then I will turn my belly upwards and my back downwards and move on the water. I will move as weeds do, not by swimming as swimmers do. I will become dead. I will entrust myself to the water. To die before death is to be safe from torment."

To die before death is to be safe, young person! That is what

Mustafa told us. He said, "Die all of you, before death comes. Otherwise, you will die with terrible sufferings."

The fish died in that way. He threw his belly upwards. The water carried him down below and then up on top of the water. All of the fishermen who were chasing him were very unhappy saying, "Oh no! The best fish is dead." The fish was very happy at their saying, "Oh no!" He said to himself, "This trick of mine has worked. I am saved from the blade."

One of the fishermen grabbed him and spat on him and flung him on the ground. The half-intelligent fish, rolling over and over, went secretly into the water.

The third fish who was stupid remained where he was, moving back and forward in agitation, That stupid one kept leaping about, right and left, trying to save his skin by his own efforts.

They threw the net, and in the end he was in the net. Stupidity brought him into the fire. Over the fire, on the surface of the frying pan, he was alone with his stupidity. He bubbled and crackled from the heat of the flames. His intelligence said to him, "Did a warner not come to you?" (Qur'an 67: 8). He, out of his torture and suffering, replied, just like the souls of the unbelievers, "They said, 'Yes'." (Qur'an 67: 9)

Then he said, "If this time I escape from this neck-breaking suffering, I will not make my home anywhere but in the sea. I will not make a lake my home. I will find the sea which has no limits and become safe. I will live in safety and welfare forever."

The wise fish said, "I will travel. I will keep my heart away from their advice and counsel."

It is not a time for advice. Listen, travel! Go by night and let your movement be hidden, like the night patrol. Set out from this lake towards the sea; seek the sea and leave this whirlpool.

That cautious fish swam away and went from its dangerous dwelling to the sea of light, like a deer which is being pursued by a hunting dog keeps running as long as there is a single nerve in its body. The hare's sleep while the dog is following is a serious wrong action.

The fish left and took its way to the sea. It took the far way to the great expanse of the sea. It suffered much, and in the end it went, after all, towards safety and welfare. It threw itself into the deep Sea whose edge no eye can see.

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Knowledge and Opinion

Knowledge has two wings, and opinion one wing. Opinion is incomplete and incapable of flight. The one-winged bird soon falls head first; then again it flies up for two steps or a little more.

The bird, opinion, falling and rising, goes on with one wing in hope of reaching the nest; but when he has been rescued from opinion, and Knowledge shows its face to him, that one-winged bird becomes two-winged and spreads his wings.

Then, he walks upright and straight, and does not fall flat on his face or become wobbly. He flies up high with both wings, like the angel Jibril, without opinion, uncertainty or argument.

If all the world says to him, "You are on the Way of Allah and are following the true religion," he will not be made more enthusiastic by their words; his lonely soul will not mate with them.

If they all say to him, "You are astray; you think you are a mountain, but in reality you are a blade of straw," he will not fall into doubt because of their mocking him, and he will not be made unhappy by their leaving him.

No, if the seas and the mountains should come to be able to speak and say to him, "You have committed yourself to hell," he would not fall into fantasy or sickness at all on account of the mockery of those who mock him.

Types of blindness

A dog and a blind dervish

Like a warlike lion, a dog attacked a blind dervish on a certain street. Dogs rush angrily at dervishes, but the moon smears her eyes with the dust of dervishes' feet.

The blind man was made helpless by the dog's barking and by his own fear of the dog, and so he began to pay honour to the dog. He said, "Prince of the chase, and lion of the hunt, you have the upper hand: hold your hand back from attacking me!" For, out of necessity, even that famous philosopher Nasir ad-Din at-Tusi paid honour to Hulagu the Mongol who was as low as the tail of an ass, and gave him the title of "noble."

The blind man too, from necessity, said, "O lion, what good will come to you from such a meagre catch as I? Your friends catch wild asses in the desert and you catch a blind man in the street; this is bad. Your friends seek wild asses by hunting them; but you, in bad temper, seek a blind man in the street."

The intelligent dog makes the wild ass his prey, while this worthless dog attacks a blind man.

When the dog learns the knowledge imparted to him he escapes from error; he hunts lawful prey in the jungles. When the dog becomes knowledgeable like a man of knowledge (*'alim*), he marches briskly. When the dog becomes a knower of Allah (*'arif*)

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he becomes like the Men of the Cave mentioned in the Qur'an who were separated from their people because they were devoted to Allah, but their people were far from Him.

The dog has come to know who is the Master of the hunt. O Allah, what is that knowing light? If the blind man doesn't know it, it's not because he hasn't got an eye with which to see it; no, it's because he is drunk with his ignorance.

Truly, the blind man is not more blind than the earth; and the earth, by the grace of Allah, became a seer of Allah's enemies. It saw the Light of Musa (AS) and showed kindness to Musa; but it swallowed up Qarun, the wealthy Israeli who disobeyed Musa, because the earth knew Qarun.

The earth shook violently to destroy every false pretender and so, many of the ancient peoples who disobeyed the prophets were destroyed by earthquakes. It understood the words which Allah said to it, "O earth, swallow (your water)!" (Quran surah Hud: 44) and so the earth swallowed up the waters of the great Flood which destroyed the people who disobeyed the prophet Nuh (AS). Earth, water, air and sparking fire don't know us, but they know Allah. On the other hand, we are aware of things other than Allah, but are forgetful of Allah and of so many warners and prophets.

The elements – earth, water, fire and air – **all shrank from (accepting) it (the trust offered to them)** (Qur'an 33; 72). Their desire to take part in life was blunted. They said, "We don't like to be alive to what Allah has created and dead to Allah Himself."

When anyone keeps away from what Allah has created, he is an orphan. In order to be close to Allah, the heart must be free from everything else.

A Mule and a Camel

Amule said to a camel, "Good friend, in the hill and valley and on difficult paths you do not fall on your head but go happily along, while I tumble on my head, like one who has lost his way. At every moment I fall on my face, whether in a dry or in a wet place. Tell me what causes this, so that I may know how to live."

The camel said, "My sight is clearer than yours; furthermore, I also look from higher up. When I arrive at the top of a high hill, I look attentively towards the end of the way in front of me. Then too Allah shows me all the low and high parts of the way, and so I take every step with clear sight and am saved from tripping and falling. However, you do not see even as much as two or three steps in front of you: you see the bait put in the trap to catch the wild animal and you desire it, but you do not see the pain of being caught in the trap. **Are the blind and those who see equal** (Surat ar-Ra'd "Thunder": 17) in your opinion, in their living in a place and their touching down and in their travelling?"

Advice and a fool

A certain man caught a bird by cunning in a trap. The bird said to him, "Noble sir, you have eaten many cattle and sheep and you have sacrificed many camels, but you have never in the world eaten of them so well that you never want to eat again; neither will you be satisfied by eating my limbs.

"Let me go, so that I can give you as a gift three pieces of advice, and then you will see whether I am wise or foolish.

"I will give you the first of those pieces of advice while I am yet on your hand, the second of them from your plastered roof, and the third piece of advice I will give you from a tree. Let me go, because you will become lucky because of these three pieces of advice.

"As for that advice which I tell you while on your hand, it is this: 'Do not believe something ridiculous when you hear it, no matter from whom.'

When the bird had given the first serious piece of advice while on his captor's palm, it became free and went to perch on the wall of his house.

It said, "The second is, 'Do not become unhappy over what is past. When it has gone from you, do not feel regret for it'."

After that, it said to him, "In my body there is concealed a single

large and very valuable pearl, which is ten dirhams in weight. By the truth of your soul and as surely as you live, that jewel was your fortune and the good luck of your children. You have lost the pearl, because it was not destined for you to gain it, a pearl the like of which there is no other in the whole world."

Just as a very pregnant woman cries out at the time of giving birth, so the man began to weep desperately. The bird said to him, "Did I not advise you, saying, 'Have no grief for what happened yesterday'? Since it is past and gone, why are you so unhappy? Either you did not understand my advice or you are deaf.

"As for the second piece of advice I gave you, 'Do not believe a ridiculous statement. O lion, I myself do not weigh dirhams; how could the weight of ten dirhams be inside me?'"

The man recovered his wits and said, "Please, tell me the third piece of your excellent good advice."

"Yes," said the bird, "you have made such good use of those first pieces of advice, that I should tell you the third! That would be a waste of time!"

To give advice to a sleepy ignoramus is to scatter seed on barren soil.

The rip of foolishness and ignorance cannot be patched up; do not give the seed of wisdom to a fool!

A prayer for bad people

A certain Imam, whenever he mounted the mimbar, would begin to pray for the highway robbers who plunder and treat right-acting people badly. He would lift up his hand, crying, "O Lord, let mercy fall upon bad men and corrupters and arrogant wrongdoers, all who laugh at good people, upon all whose hearts are unbelieving and those who live in Christian monasteries." He would not pray for the pure; he would pray for none but the wicked. They said to him, "This is unheard of; it's no generosity to pray for people of wrong action."

He replied, "I have experienced good from these people; it is for this reason I have chosen to pray for them. They did so much wickedness, injustice and oppression that they made me go from evil to good. Whenever I turned my face towards this world, they hit and beat me, and I took refuge from the blows there with Allah; the wolves always brought me back to the right Way. I must pray for them, intelligent one, because they were the way that I became spiritually healthy."

The slave of Allah complains to Allah of pain; he complains a hundred time of his pain. Allah says, "After all, grief and pain have made you humbly beg Me and act right. Rather you should complain of the bounty that comes to you and moves you far away from My door and makes you an outcast."

In reality every enemy of yours is your medicine; he is a magic potion and so he is beneficial and one that seeks to win your heart, because you run away from him into solitude and beg help from Allah' grace.

Your friends are really your enemies, for they make you far from the Presence of Allah and keep you occupied with them.

There is an animal, the porcupine, which becomes fat and big by blows of the stick because it raises all its bristles. The more you beat it, the more it thrives; it grows fat on blows of the stick.

Certainly, the true believer's soul is a porcupine, for it is made strong and fat by the blows of trials and sufferings. For this reason the trials, suffering and humiliation laid upon the prophets is greater than that laid upon all other creatures in the world, so that their souls became stronger than all other souls; for no other class of people suffered that suffering.

The leather hide is made to suffer because of the substance used to tan it, but it becomes sweet like the softest and best leather; if the tanner did not rub the bitter and sour liquid into it, the leather would become rotten, unpleasant and foul-smelling.

Man is an untanned leather, made noisy and ugly by his nature. Give him bitter, sour discipline and much rubbing with suffering, so that he may become pure, lovely and very strong. If you cannot do that yourself, be content, clever one, if Allah gives you suffering without your choice. Suffering sent by the Friend is the way for you to become purified. His knowledge is above your planning. Suffering becomes sweet to the sufferer when he sees that it leads to happiness. The medicine becomes sweet to the sick man when he sees that it leads to health.

He sees victory for himself in the very essence of checkmate, so he says, "Kill me, O trusty ones!"

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Unexpected results

A wealthy man told a deaf man, "One of your neighbours is ill." The deaf man said to himself, "Since I am hard of hearing, what will I be able to understand of that young man's words? Especially as he is ill and his voice is weak. But I have to go and visit him, there is no escape from that.

"When I see his lips moving, I will guess what he is saying.

"When I say, 'How are you?' he will say, 'I am fine,' or I am pretty well?' I will say, 'Thanks be to Allah. What have you had to drink?' He will say, 'Some sherbert' or 'a soup of kidney beans.' So I will say, 'May you enjoy good health! Who is your doctor?' He will answer, 'So-and-so.' I will say, 'He is one who brings great fortune with him,' and I will remark, 'Since he has come, things will go well with you. I have experienced his good fortune. Wherever he goes, people get what they want from him'."

The good man prepared his guesses and went to see the invalid

"How are you?" he asked. "I am at the point of death," said the sick man. "Thanks be to Allah!" said the deaf man. At this the patient became resentful and indignant, saying to himself, "What reason has he got for being thankful? He must be my enemy."

The deaf man guessed, but he had guessed wrong.

After that he asked him what he had drunk. "Poison," said the

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sick man. "May it do you good and give you health!" said the deaf man. The sick man became more and more angry.

Then he asked, "Which doctor is looking after you?"

He replied, "Azra'il, the Angel of Death, is coming. Get out!"

"His coming is very blessed!" said the deaf man, "You must be very happy!"

The deaf man went out. He said happily, "Thanks be to Allah for that! Now I can take my leave."

The invalid said, "This man is my mortal enemy. I did not know he was so full of evil."

The sick man looked for a hundred insults, so that he could send a message full of them. It is just as when someone has eaten bad food. It turns his stomach until he vomits it; but, suppress your anger! Do not vomit it out, so that you will be rewarded with sweet words in exchange!

However, the sick man had no patience. He was in torment. "Where is this dog?" he said, "So that I can pour on him the same insults he poured on me. When he said all those things, I could not think of a good answer because I was sick. One visits the sick to give them some rest. This was not a real visit to the sick. He wanted to see me, his enemy, weak, so that he would feel at peace."

There are many people who do acts which are for Allah, but they want people to approve of them and reward them at the same time. This is really a hidden wrong action. What they think is pure is really rotten.

It is like the deaf man. He thought he was doing a kindness, but he did the opposite. He sits down well pleased with himself and says, "I have visited my sick neighbour which was my duty."

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However, what he really did was to light a fire in the sick man's heart. That fire burned him himself.

Take great care of the fire which you yourself light.

* * *

Mawlana Rumi warns us against praying to Allah in the same way as the deaf man who visited the sick man. We might think we earn a great deal of good by our prayers, but we may have only made Allah, glorious is He, angry with us.

Generosity by habit

A great fire happened in the time of 'Umar (RA). It ate up stones as if they were firewood. It attacked buildings and houses. Eventually it even flared up at the wings of the birds and their nests. Half of the city caught fire from the flames. Even water was afraid of the fire and was amazed at it.

Some intelligent people threw water and even vinegar on the fire. However, the fire only increased. Help came to the fire from One who is Infinite.

People came running to 'Umar, saying, "The fire will not be put out by the water at all."

He said, "This fire is one of the signs of Allah. It is a flame from the fire of your badness. Forget the water and give out bread as *sadaqah*. Stop being greedy, if you are my people."

They said to him, "We have opened our doors. We have been generous. We are devoted to generosity."

He replied, "You have given people food only because of tradition and habit. You have not been generous for the sake of Allah. You only did it to become well known and for your pride, not because of your fear of Allah and your prayer."

Wealth is a seed. Do not plant it in bad soil. Don't give weapons to thieves and robbers.

Know the difference between the people of the *deen* and its enemies. Look for the man who sits with Allah, and sit with him.

Everyone shows favour to his own people. The fool who shows favour to fools thinks that he has really done a good action.

On being literal

A man who was playing chess said, "This is the house of the rook." Someone who always takes things literally asked, "How did the house come into its hands? Did it buy the house, or inherit it?" Happy is the man who goes quickly to the real meaning.

* * *

This is the way that language teachers explain how language works. They make up examples to show the verbs and the nouns. A teacher of grammar says, "Zayd struck 'Amr."

The fool says, "How could he punish him even though he had done nothing wrong? What did 'Amr do wrong that made that rude Zayd hit him, although he was innocent, as if he were only a slave?"

The teacher said, "This sentence is only the measure of the meaning which it shows. Take some wheat, and don't look at the measuring jug. Zayd and 'Amr are just two words which we use to show how the verb – 'struck' – works. Even if it is not true that Zayd struck 'Amr, learn the way that the verb works."

"No," he said, "I don't know about that. How could Zayd strike 'Amr without his having committed any crime or done something wrong?"

The teacher, in desperation, told a joke, “‘Amr had stolen an extra waw (the name ‘Amr (آمر) is spelt just like ‘Umar (أمار) except that a letter waw is added at the end so that they can be told apart). Zayd learnt about it and struck him for stealing. Since ‘Amr broke the law, the punishment serves him right.”

The fool said, “Here you are! This is the truth! I accept it with all my soul!”

Look at how wrong seems right to the wrong-headed!

Hair-splitting

A man, whose hair was two-coloured, came in a great hurry to a well respected hairdresser. He said, “Pick the white hairs out of my beard. I have chosen a new bride, young man.” The hairdresser cut off his beard and put all of it in front of him. He said, “You pick out the white hairs, because I have important business.” That saying of his “pick them out” is like splitting hairs, and Islam has no love of that.

* * *

A man slapped Zayd on the neck. Zayd right away rushed towards him to hit him back. The one who struck him said, “I will ask you a question. Answer me first and then hit me. I hit the back of your neck, and there was the sound of a slap. Was the sound caused by my hand or by the back of your neck?” Zayd said, “Because of the pain, I do not have time to think about this. You have no pain. Think about it: the one who feels the pain has no such thought. Take heed!”

Patience

Luqman went to Dawud (AS), the pure-hearted. He saw that he was making iron rings. The great king Dawud was knitting all the steel rings together. Luqman had never seen the craft of the chain-mail maker before.

He was astonished. His curiosity increased. "What is this?" he said to himself, "I will ask him what he is making with these interleaved rings." But then he said to himself, "Patience is better. Patience is the quickest guide to get to where one wants to go."

When you don't ask a question, the quicker the answer is shown you. The bird, patience, flies faster than all the others. If you ask, the slower you get what you want. Something which is easy will be made difficult by your impatience.

When Luqman stayed silent, Dawud (AS), by his skill, finished his work straight away.

Then he made a coat of mail. He put it on when Luqman was there. He said, "This is an excellent piece of clothing, young man. It protects you from blows of the sword in battle and in war."

Luqman said, "Patience is also useful. It protects and defends against every pain."

Allah has connected patience (*sabr*) to the real and permanent (*haqq*). Reader, read carefully the end of Surat al-'Asr. Allah says, "And they advise each other to be true, and they advise each other to be patient."

Allah has created hundreds of thousands of wonderful medicines and remedies, but man has seen nothing like patience.

Allah's gifts

Bilqis was the queen of Saba. The gift which she sent to Sulayman (AS) was forty mules whose entire load was bricks of gold. When her minister reached the open plain belonging to Sulayman (AS), he saw that its carpet was made wholly of solid gold. He rode on gold for the distance of forty stages each stage of which was twelve miles. At the end gold meant nothing more to him.

Many times they said, "Let us take the gold back to the treasury. What a waste of time this is! This is a spacious land and its soil is pure gold. To bring gold as a gift here is silly."

O you who bring your intelligence to Allah as a gift, there intelligence is worth less than the dust of the road.

When the worthlessness of their gift became obvious, their shame made them want to return to Bilqis. However, they said, "Whether it is valuable or worthless, what does it matter to us? We are only slaves who must obey orders. Whether we have to bring gold or earth, the orders of those who give orders must be obeyed. If Sulayman tells us to bring it back, then we must take it back as ordered."

When Sulayman (AS) saw the gift, he laughed. He said, "When did I ask you for porridge? I did not tell you to give me gifts. I tell you to be worthy of the gifts I give you."

Allah's gifts

"I have rare gifts from the Unseen, which human beings dare not even ask for. You worship the star which you think makes gold. Turn your faces towards Him who makes the star."

"You worship the sun in the sky, and you despise the Spirit which is so valuable. The sun is our cook, by the command of Allah. It is mad to say that it is God. If the sun is eclipsed what will you do? How will you rid it of that blackness? Will you not bring your headache to the court of Allah, saying, 'Take the blackness away. Bring back the light!'"

"If you sincerely bow in prayer to Allah, you will be freed from the stars. You will become intimate with Allah. Just as is the tiny speck of dust in comparison to the sun, so is the sun in comparison to the light of Allah."

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The kingdom of the world

Quickly knock the kingdom of the world to pieces just as Ibrahim ibn Adham did, so that you might win the kingdom of everlasting life. He was the Amir of Balkh.

One night that king was asleep on his throne. There were guards on the roof of the palace.

The reason the king had guards was not to keep robbers and stupid people away. He knew that the just man is free from fear of attack and is safe in his heart.

He was listening to all the sounds of the guards with their trumpets because it made him remember the trumpet of the Last Hour of the world.

At night on the throne, that man heard the noise of tramping and loud excited voices from the roof. He heard loud footsteps from the roof of the palace. Ibrahim thought, "Who dares to do this?"

He shouted out of the palace window, "Who is it? This is not a man; it must be a jinn!"

Some amazing people put their heads down from the roof. They said, "We are going around by night searching."

"Eh," he said, "What are you looking for?"

The kingdom of the world

"Camels," they said.

He said, "Think about what you say! No one looks for camels on the roof!"

Then they said to him, "How then do you try to look for Allah while you sit on the throne of state?"

That was all.

No one in Balkh saw Ibrahim ever again. He vanished like a jinn from the sight of man. His real self had been hidden from them, although he was there with people. How could people see anything but beard and clothing?

He went far away from his own and from people's eyes. Then he became famous in the world.

* * *

Ibrahim ibn Adham gave up being the Amir of Balkh and lived a simple life in poverty. He is one of the most famous of the early Muslims right up to this day.

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Trust in the generous

We have heard that someone was the guest of Anas ibn Malik (RA). That man said that after the meal Anas saw the table napkin was yellow. It was dirty and stained. He said, "Servant girl, throw it into the oven at once."

Right away the intelligent girl threw it into the oven, which was full of flames. All the guests were astonished at that. They expected to see smoke from the burning napkin. However, after a little she took it out of the oven. It was clean, white and all the dirt was gone.

The guests said, "Noble Companion, why did it not burn? How did it become clean?"

He answered, "Because Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah (SAAS) often rubbed his hands and lips on this napkin."

You whose heart is afraid of the Fire and the torment of Hell, come close to such a hand and lip as that! It gave such honour to a lifeless object. What things will it reveal to the soul of a lover of Allah?

He (SAAS) made the stones of the Ka'bah the *qiblah* to which the Muslims turn. O spirit, be a humble servant of spiritual people in your war.

Afterwards they said to the servant girl, "Will you not tell us

your own feelings about this? Why did you throw it so quickly into the oven when he told you? I am sure that he knew the secret already, but why did you throw such a precious napkin into the fire?"

She answered, "I trust in the generous. I do not give up hope of their generosity. So what, that it was a piece of cloth? If he told me to go right into the fire without regret, I would throw myself in with complete confidence. I have great hope in those who are devoted to Allah. I would not only throw this napkin in but myself too, because of my confidence in all generous ones who know the secret."

Brother, look carefully at this. A man's trust should not be less than this woman's.

Light

Shaykh 'Abdullah Maghribi said, "For sixty years I have never seen the quality of night in the night. For sixty years I have never experienced any darkness, neither by day nor by night, nor because of any illness."

The Sufis say that he spoke the truth: "At night time we would follow him across deserts filled with thorns and ditches. He went in front of us like the full moon. Without looking behind him, he would say, even though it was night-time, 'Look out! There is a ditch here; turn to the left!' Then, a little while later, he would say, 'Turn to the right, because there are some thorns in front of your feet.' When day would break, his feet would be like the feet of a bride. There would be no dust or earth on them. There were no scratches from thorns or bruises from stones."

Allah made the Maghribi luminous. The light of this one belongs to the Sun of suns. How should that glorious light, which brings thousands of suns into view not be a guardian? By His light you always walk safely among dragons and scorpions. That sacred light goes in front of you and tears every robber to pieces.

Know the correct meaning of the words: "On the Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believe with him," then read, "Their light will stream out ahead of them" (Surat at-Tahrim, 8).

Light

Although that light will be increased on the Resurrection, ask Allah for it here also, because He gives spiritual light, and Allah knows best how to give it.

Death is a door

When Bilal became as thin as the new-moon from weakness, the colour of death showed on his face. His wife saw him in this state and cried, "Oh, sorrow!"

Bilal said to her, "No, no! Say, 'Oh, joy!' Until now I have been in sorrow from living; how can you know how delightful death is, and what it really is?"

He said this, and at the very moment of saying it his countenance was blooming as if with narcissi, rose-leaves, and red anemones.

The glow of his face and his eyes full of radiance testified to the truth of his words.

Every black-hearted one regarded him as black and despised him; but why is the pupil of the eye black? The man who is spiritually blind is black-faced, but the man with the inward eye is a mirror for the Moon.

His wife said to him, "This is the parting, man of good qualities."

"No, no!" said he, "It is the union, the union with Allah."

The wife said, "Tonight you will go to a strange country, you will leave your family and relations."

"No, no," he replied, "On the contrary, tonight in reality my spirit is coming home from a strange country."

She said, "Where will we see your face?"

He answered, "In Allah's chosen circle."

His chosen circle adjoins you, if you look upward, not downward. In that circle the Light from the Lord of created beings is gleaming like the golden setting for the jewel in the circle of the seal-ring.

"Alas," she said, "This house has been ruined."

"Look on the moon," said he. "Do not look on the cloud. He has ruined it in order that He may make it more properous. I had many relations and the house was too small. Before, I was imprisoned in grief, like Adam; now both East and West are filled with my spiritual children. I was a beggar in a dungeon-like house; now I have become a king and a palace is needed for a king."

To the prophets this world seems narrow. If this world is not narrow, why this weeping? Why does everyone become more bowed with age and affliction the more he lives in it?

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The gathering of the Last Day

When Allah gives a spirit to the little unborn child in the womb, he puts in the spirit's nature the desire to draw particles together. By means of food it draws the particles together and weaves the warp and woof of it's body. Until the age of forty years, Allah will have made it desire to draw particles together for it's growth. The incomparable King, Allah, showed the spirit how to draw particles together; how should He Himself not know how to draw particles together?

The one who assembled all these little things together to make everything is Allah who is the Light of everything as the sun is the light of the day. He know's how to make your body's particles and make them come together again without the process of eating and drinking.

At the moment when you wake up. He quickly calls your consciousness and feelings of sensation back so that you may know that those faculties have not become absent from Him. They come back to you when He tells them to return.

Mawlana Rumi

Mawlana Jaluluddin Rumi was born in Balkh in Afghanistan in 603 Ah/1207 CE. His father, himself a great man of knowledge, fled before the advancing Mongol hordes warning the Muslims about what was to happen. He found a welcome, and attentive ears in Konya under the Seljuqs. Mawlana Rumi received a thorough grounding in all the sciences of Islam, of which he was a noted teacher, before his famous encounter with Shams-e-Tabriz transformed him into the profound human being and great poet that he was. He died in 671 AH/1273 CE, rahimahu'llahu ta'ala.

This Book

This book is like little drops of water from the great ocean that is the Mathnawi. In some places it is more literally adapted and in others more faithfully to the essence of the tale. If it has value it is that it will lead the reader to plunge into that astonishing work. The Mathnawi is known as "the Qur'an in Persian" not because its author seeks to equate it with the Qur'an but because in it he so remarkably expounds the Qur'an. Although the Mathnawi is not a children's book, the stories have the directness and clarity which are a delight to the young, and which will prove to be a treasure-chest of instruction in later life.

